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To cross a deep river such as the Missouri was quite an undertaking. When they reached the bank, they would spread out in family groups, while the men and women worked together to convert the lodges into round boats. Coming Daylight gave the following description. "The lodge cover was folded in half lengthwise over a rope of sufficient length that the ends protruded somewhat. Mud was then smeared as a layer between the two halves of the cover and on the outside of that half which would ultimately be in the water. The next step was to take the loose edges together, to form the rim of the boat by bunching up a considerable bit of the material and tying securely; leaving a free space, bunching up another bit of the material, leaving another free space, and repeating this operation at intervals, shaping the receptacle to the proper diameter by running a rope taut from 'tuft' to 'tuft'; then they packed in very carefully as much as the round boat would safely hold, and finally the portion of the rim which was formed by the fold—as distinct from the now 'tufted' free edges—was gathered into place by manipulating the ends of the rope which had been placed originally in the fold, the rope being now tied securely. A lead rope was attached to one 'tuft' at each side of the gathered portion of the rim. Two young men on horseback then dragged the boat into the water and took it across the river, dragging it safely up on the opposite bank." [16]

The boat was watertight and safe to transport any of their belongings, and even children or disabled adults. When the water transporting was finished the mud was washed off and the lodge cover spread on the ground to dry. This didn't take long and the lodge cover was soon as good as new.

The lodge poles had to be transported separately from the cover. The poles were cut when needed, and a hole was burned about four inches from the top of each. When the lodge was up, the free ends of the short strings of buckskin, run through these holes, fluttered in the breeze, making a fine decoration. The more practical purpose of the holes, however, was to allow a number of poles to be strung together for moving. For water transport not more

[16] Maximilian, who met the Gros Ventres on the Missouri in 1833, mentions, p. 73, their round boats made of buffalo skin, filled with articles for barter, "drawn by one swimmer and pushed by another."

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would share at least the meat, if not the hides, with the less fortunate, which latter would contribute by helping skin and butcher.

Butchering was quite an art and was considered the man's work, although occasionally women accompanied the hunting party if there were a shortage of men, as was liable to be the case especially in winter. Should the party have crossed a river to hunt, the meat was prepared for transportation on a raft by being cut into large chunks, and each two chunks skewered and joined by a thong of sufficient length to hang on the poles forming the raft. The raft was built by crossing two long poles at one end, the other ends free and forming an angle of about thirty degrees. Three or four shorter poles were placed crosswise and lashed firmly in place with rawhide. The paunch of the buffalo, after being washed out, was used as a container for the many leftover bits of meat and was tied to the middle of the lower rung of the raft. A whole beef could thus be loaded on such a raft and towed across by one horseman. When, as was more usually the case, the meat was to be packed back to camp by horses, the butchering was done differently but in such a way that a whole buffalo could be packed on a single horse.[8] Sometimes in winter when a small party went out and they could not pack all the meat back in one trip, the remainder was buried in the snow and called for the following day.

Once the proceeds of the hunt were turned over to the households of the individual hunters, it was the woman's task to cook the food for immediate consumption and to prepare the surplus for storage. Her most arduous and time-consuming task was the dressing of skins and the manufacture of these into finished articles of clothing, containers, lodge-covers, and so on. It was stated that skins in one stage of preparation or another were nearly always at hand.[9] "They didn't do things in a haphazard way because there was a certain time to do this and a certain time to do that." From the hides of buffalo killed during the spring and early summer, when the hair was not thick, they made the parfleshes and bags, soles for moccasins, rawhide ropes, and lodge-covers. In the fall, when the hide was furry, robes were made.

The older women informants described how, when they were

[8] Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 149.

[9] For some details on skin dressing, see Kroeber, 1908, p. 150.